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ABSTRACT

A survey was taken to identify characteristics of Indian students completing high school. Using the regional Indian education network, 571 surveys were mailed to 1987 high school graduates; 123 surveys were returned for a 23-plus percent response rate. Responses came from public and tribal schools, urban and rural, in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana. Responses showed a variety of student types. Half of the students surveyed were involved in sports, 35% in church activities, 25% in tribal activities, and 15% in civic organizations. Their average cumulative grade point average was 2.86. Eighty-two percent of students identified teachers as most influential in their success. Forty-seven percent also identified counselors and 39% identified coaches as influential. Attributes of most influential teachers included caring and positive attitudes, honesty, concern, respect, and patience. These teachers made school interesting, and inspired and challenged the students, while maintaining high expectations. The most helpful teachers were those who gave help willingly, were open-minded, encouraged goal setting, were supportive when students failed, but complimented them when they did well. Half of the Indian students surveyed ascribed their motivation to finish high school to the reward of current successful experiences, including individual attention of teachers and participation in sports and other extracurricular activities. High expectations of family and friends, aspirations for a college education, self-confidence, and the negative consequences of dropping out were also cited as strong motivations. Students suggested telling other students that finishing high school is the way to future success on and off the reservation. (DHP)

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CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL INDIAN STUDENTS

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Characteristics of Successful Indian Students

In an attempt to isolate those criteria with which success (high school completion) of Indian students are identified we began with a literature review.

A search of the ERIC/RER database revealed little information of value. Two major studies were found through discussions with Indian educators in the region:

(1) Abt Study of Indian Controlled Schools (1985). Part of the Abt study involved the nomination and selection of secondary level Indian students from Indian controlled schools to receive outstanding Student Awards nationally. A number of non-academic criteria were also specified by local community members as important. They included:

- native language and culture
- leadership skills
- citizenship
- self-concept/attitude
- motivation/aspirations
- social participation
- athletic participation
- creativity
- attendance
- complies with community codes of behavior

(2) Alaska DOE/University of Alaska-Juneau Study of Characteristics of Successful Native Leaders (1986). Characteristics of successful native leaders in Southeast Alaska were studied. The study found that positive educational experiences at some point in a person's formal education would promote success in adult life. Another important factor which contributes to success in adult life is the positive influence and encouragement of some member of the family, as well as some persons outside the family. Socio-economic level generally has a positive effect on subsequent success. Success as a student and success in adult life are highly related. Successful individuals had a personal goal set by them or their parents. They also felt that they had had opportunities to succeed.

The two studies are very valuable as a framework for our project. The parallel findings of these studies provide a perspective on the reasons (criteria) for success from both successful native adults and succeeding native students.

Based upon the results of the literature review, the following criteria appear to be relevant for identifying successful Indian students:

1. Academic Achievement: Grades and test scores show demonstrated ability above average.

2. Academic Attitude: Attendance, classroom participation and completion of assignments indicate an interest in learning and a value for school.

3. Talent: Artistic, athletic or other talents are demonstrated.

4. Leadership: Demonstrates leadership skills and aspirations in the school and/or community.

5. Social Responsibility: Values and abides by community codes of conduct.

6. Aspirations: Has positive goals for the future which he/she intends to accomplish.

7. Respected Role Models: Has one or more mentors from school, community and/or family which guide him or her in setting and attaining aspirations.

It was felt that a review of these criteria by members of our regional network would help us to further refine and finalize the list.

A symposium of researchers who have done recent studies in Indian leadership or Indian gifted and talented students was convened at the Laboratory in March for two reasons:

1) To share their findings with the group and,

2) To review our work to date and make suggestions for further exploration.

Those attending the symposium were:

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As a result of the symposium a survey instrument was constructed. It draws heavily upon the 1986 Alaska Department of Education/University of Alaska-Juneau Study of Characteristics of Successful Native Leaders, especially Part 1, which pertains to school. The survey contains questions which address the seven criteria on page two, but also looks especially at more external influential factors. The answers of which should be of more benefit to schools and teachers.

Approval of the instrument for protection of human subjects and from the Research and Development Program for Indian Education Policy Board was not completed until July, well after school was out.

Utilizing the regional Indian education network, 571 surveys were mailed to 1987 high school graduates. One hundred thirty-three were returned for a twenty-three plus percentage return rate.

The responses came from public and tribal schools, both urban and rural, in the states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana.

We feel that the sample is adequate to give a profile of successful characteristics within our region, although we plan on conducting a more thorough one prior to graduation in 1988.

The results of the survey follow:

[40%] Male
[60%] Female

[5%] Idaho
[36%] Montana
[24%] Oregon
[34%] Washington

1. Which statement best captures your feelings about school in general?

   a. 70% I liked school a lot
   b. 23% I liked school a little
   c. 6% I did not like school very much
   d. 1% I hated school

2. Rate how well you liked the following in your school:

	Liked 1	2	3	4	Disliked 5
a. teachers	(38%)	(34%)	(20%)	(4.5%)	(2.3%)
b. other students	(39%)	(36%)	(16%)	(6.8%)	(1.5%)
c. classes	(21%)	(46%)	(22%)	(8.0%)	(3.0%)
d. social activities	(35%)	(31%)	(20%)	(7.5%)	(3.8%)
e. extra curricular activities	(52%)	(17%)	(16%)	(7.0%)	(6.0%)
f. atmosphere	(26%)	(29%)	(32%)	(10%)	(3.0%)

3. What extra curricular activities were you involved in? (check all that apply).

24% band
20% chorus
14% drama
70% sports
8% debate
12% cheerleading
17% student government
26% newspaper/yearbook
61% clubs

18% other (specify)

4. What community activities were you involved in?

25% tribal
35% church
49% sports
15% civic organizations (Scouts, etc.)
20% other

5. What was your cumulative GPA? 2.86% (2% had less than a 2.00 GPA and 32% had greater than a 3.00 GPA)

6. Do you feel you excelled in:

coursework 53%
extra curricular 65%

7. Which school personnel influenced you to succeed?

25% administrators
82% teachers
47% counselors
39% coaches
2% nurses
4% cooks
17% secretaries
36% Indian education personnel

8. How many teachers were especially influential in helping you to succeed?

2% none
56% 1 - 3
36% 3 - 10
6% more

9. How would you describe those teachers that were most helpful to you?

74% caring
62% dedicated
74% positive attitude
67% concerned
35% attentive
51% pleasant
24% high integrity
42% high morals
55% hard working
17% conscientious
59% challenged me
81% respected me
68% patient
32% strict
39% firm
57% kind
68% had high expectations for me
69% made school interesting
50% desire to teach
38% demanded superior effort from me
45% sincere
60% inspired me
33% informal

33% informal
65% open minded
69% gave help willingly
60% spent extra time helping me
61% took a personal interest in me
67% encouraged me to set goals
72% honest
39% excited about teaching
31% disciplined me
65% supportive when I failed
81% complimented me when I did well
59% treated me as though I was important to them
68% provided advice when I asked
11% an "easy" teacher
5% let me get away with not following the rules
74% listened to me
14% other

Our survey reveals that the successful Indian student most likely:

- Liked school (93%)
- Liked other students (75%), closely followed by liked teachers (72%) and extracurricular activities (71%)
- All students were involved in extra curricular activities with sports (70% - both boys and girls) and clubs (61%) the most numerous
- Both sports (49%) and church (35%) were popular community activities
- Grades averaged 2.86
- Students felt extracurricular activities were their strength (65%) although over half (53%) felt coursework was strong (many answered affirmative to both)
- A majority of students (82%) felt that teachers influenced them to succeed with most (56%) feeling that only a small number of teachers (1-3) influenced them
- Most helpful teachers were those that respected and complimented the students (81%), although most of the positive characteristics of teachers ranked high throughout

Of note, two negative characteristics were included, and were by far ranked at the bottom...easy teacher (11%) and did not enforce rules (5%).

The final three questions of the survey were open ended ones and those results are displayed separately below.

10. Describe the most important things that happened in school which you feel motivated you to finish.

The graduates had a lot to say about this topic and their responses varied a great deal. Their responses were categorized into six major topics of motivation, with the proportion cited in each:

1. The expectation of others to finish school (17%)
2. The reward of current successful experiences (50%)
3. The consequences of current negative experiences (5%)
4. The reward of future success (14%)
5. The consequences of future failure (1%)
6. Internal motivation of the student (12%)

Clearly, students most frequently noted the positive experiences that they had in school as reasons for finishing high school. In rank order they were:

1. The individual attention of teachers
2. Participation in sports
3. Participation in other extracurricular activities
4. The individual attention of administrators and counselors
5. The challenges and accomplishments of school
6. Interesting classes
7. Opportunity to be with friends
8. The honor of graduating

Students also mentioned the high expectations of significant others in their lives. In rank order, they were:

1. family
2. friends
3. teachers/administrators
4. church

Students also looked to the future and the successes it could bring. In rank order, they were:

1. college
2. job/professional career
3. good life
4. support of children
5. plans for the future

Many students were internally motivated, feeling that their desire to complete school came from within:

1. Persistance and confidence -- knew I could finish
2. Prove to others I could graduate
3. Desire to complete high school

Students also saw around them the consequences of dropping out, both in the present and the future:

1. Friends dropped out
2. Relatives dropped out
3. Hard life with no jobs
4. Parental disappointment in others
5. Ineligibility for sports

These comments provide evidence of the important role both curricular and extra-curricular activities play in creating successful school experiences for Indian students. It also shows that the most important experience for the student is the individual support and attention of the teachers which touch their lives.

Two additional open-ended questions were asked of the students. Both questions were aimed at determining how teachers and students could best encourage other students to complete high school.

Question number eleven asked the student to give advice to teachers on what they thought would encourage Indian students to complete high school.

11. What advice would you give to teachers on how to encourage Indian students to complete high school?

Ninety-one percent (91%) of the responses can be categorized into six major areas. They are ranked according to frequency cited.

1. Teachers should be supportive, encouraging, and willing to work with students (21%).

2. Teachers should respect Indian students as a person and/or as an Indian, without prejudice or bias (19%).

3. Teachers should be patient (15%).

4. Teachers should provide advice when needed, time to help students, compliments when students do well, listen to students and enforce discipline when necessary (15%).

5. Teachers should stress the importance of getting at least the high school diploma--that the diploma is the key to getting a good job (13%).

6. Teachers should encourage students to set goals for themselves (8%).

The remaining nine percent (9%) of the responses stressed the students' general need to have someone recognize and be there for them (5%). Teachers should have a respect for and possible training/education in Indian culture (3%). Teachers should encourage students to become involved in sports as a way of motivating students to stay in school (1%).

It appears from the comments that the teachers' role in encouraging students to stay in school is a more generalized "what makes a good teacher" role or function. Students suggest that teachers be supportive, work with students, listen to them, give them advice, and be patient with them. Important also is that teachers respect students. Numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4 could be combined into this general category of the "good teacher," for a total of seventy percent (70%) of the student responses.

Question number twelve asked students what advice they would give to <u>other Indian students</u> that would encourage them to stay in school.

12. What advice would you give to Indian students of all ages that would encourage them to complete high school?

Ninety-seven (97%) of the responses to the question can be categorized into five major areas. They are ranked according to frequency cited.

Almost half of the responses looked at the high school diploma as being the determining factor between what you can have, i.e., one's opportunities for the future (84% of those responses), or what one will end up with if you don't finish high school (16% of those responses). The responses indicate that students value high school completion, and see it as the best way to get a job and have a career.

Students suggested telling other students:

1. That finishing high school is the way to students' future success on and off the reservation; that a high school diploma is absolutely necessary to get a job and for survival in the real world (41%).

2. That students need to be proud of themselves and believe in themselves. Students need to take control of their lives--that they can do whatever they want, but they will have to work for it (28%).

3. That students should get involved with sports, activities, and make friends with peers and teachers. Tell other students that school is fun and only comes once in their lives (13%).

4. That students should set goals for themselves (10%).

5. That students should stay away from drugs and alcohol (6%).

The remaining three percent (3%) expressed sentiments regarding getting off the reservation, or taking Christ into their lives.

General Comments:

It appears that students believe that finishing high school (getting a diploma) is essential to getting a job. Students also strongly believe the role of the teacher is to be supportive, provide encouragement and have respect for the students. Many students stressed the need for teachers to be patient, provide help, listen to them and give advice when asked for.

Most students realized the importance of taking charge of their own lives and the importance of setting goals. Many students proposed encouraging other students to get involved in sports or other extracurricular activities where they could make friends and have fun during their high school years.

It appears that the advice given to students is much more specifically what <u>you</u> should do. In contrast, advice given to teachers is more along the lines of how to be, in a more generalized manner, supportive of the individual.

This study will be repeated in 1988, prior to graduation with the intent of obtaining a greater response to the survey.